

The Construction of Company Identity through Memory. 'Specialised' Metaphorical Meanings for Pastness on Italian Business Web Pages

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abstract

This paper proposes a metaphor-based approach to the **discourse about the company's past** in a cross-cultural perspective. Specifically, it analyses the metaphorical schemata used to build corporate identity through the conceptualisation of “social forms” of organisational culture in a context of remembering. The paper contends that the discourse of Italian companies deployed for the construction of a corporate memory hinges on ‘specialised’ aspects of the **war/game/building metaphors** used to conceptualise company success in terms of collective achievements, stability and strategic leadership.

Keywords: company identity, memory, specialised aspects of a concept, metaphors

The construction of company identity

- study of texts about corporate history
- metaphor-based approach to the discourse of the company's past
- sociological framework:
 - **historical identity = social identity**

Organisational culture

- values (ethics & compliance, responsibility, reliability)
- visions (what we want to be)
- mission (what we want to do)
- norms (eg auditing, market abuse)
- leadership (in which areas we are leaders)
- **strategy**
- spirit of partnership

Social memory

- individual and collective memory
- 'commemorative' symbolism
- corporate history:
 'About Us' and 'history' sections
→ www.finmeccanica.it

Semantic frame

- cognitive model (frame semantics – Fillmore)
- A frame is a cognitive model that organizes our knowledge
- a frame refers to the background knowledge necessary to understand a concept
- experience can be conceptualised through metaphors

Corpus Data

- verbal and non-verbal texts
- top 25 companies listed in the *Borsa Italiana*
- selection of metaphors embedded in the verbal and visual texts (cross-modally)
- metaphorical schemata on the notion of **strategy** (goals, plans, programmes)

Strategic management

- **war** → supremacy, service, operation, strategic plan, key areas, leadership, new bases, move
- **game** → team, players, competition, win, race, position, competitor
- **building** → foundation, solid pillars, sound basis, consolidation, restructuring, renovate

... salience given to collectivity

We operate in high technology sectors on a global level, designing, producing and integrating innovative systems, products and services **in order to provide our clients around the world** with advanced solutions in the **Aerospace, Defence and Security fields.**

Our offer covers all types of **interventions** – military and civil – meeting the needs of Governments, Institutions, Armed Forces, Intelligence Agencies, citizens and communities...

Business is a team game

- Finmeccanica Spa
www.finmeccanica.com
- emphasis on the role of human interaction and contribution to the company's success
- 'companies' are 'people'

More examples

“Finmeccanica's **great entrepreneurial history** is deeply rooted in the development of Italian and European industry. This wealth is the lifeblood that fuels **our** way into the future, the basis for a **new, stronger and more dynamic Finmeccanica** with a more coherent structure to suit the needs of the new global markets....”

We work every day to deserve the trust of all **our** stakeholders, which include customers, investors, suppliers and employees. And **we** do it by living up to **our** values:

The Generali SpA: the metaphor of *game* and *war*

- www.generali.com
- metaphoric and metonymic function of the lion as the company's logo
- **lion** = a fighter (war), a winner (game)
- the war metaphor is built around the concepts of '**leadership**', '**supremacy**' and '**win strategy planning**'
- no reference to 'conflict'

examples

- see 'WHO WE ARE' – Vision - Strategy

An increasing focus on creating value for our shareholders and on our **leadership** of the retail insurance industry in Europe.

Having restructured and improved our business from a financial, operational and governance perspective – a year ahead of scheduled in our **strategic** plan

We **play** a **proactive** and **leading role** in improving people's lives through insurance.

The **building** metaphor

- metaphor= the company is a building
- Our international presence is our greatest strength. Generali is the market leader in Italy, with **a solid base** in Europe, and is seeking to continue its growth, with a focus on Asia and South America.
- The **restructuring** involved **consolidating** similar brands,

conclusion

- conceptual metaphors are used to express and interpret discourse
- corporate historical narratives aim to build a collective memory, based on the umbrella concept of 'strategic business'
- corporate histories are structured around specialised aspects of the basic metaphors of war, game and building
- sub-mappings related to positive notions of teamwork, strategic leadership, solidity, stability, perpetuation (not perpetration p. 76)